

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----261637Z 127920 /45
O 261300Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASY KINSHASA
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S E C R E T KINSHASA SECTION 1 OF 2 2759

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DEPT PLS PASS BRUSSELS FOR UNDER SECRETARY HABIB

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINS CG
SUBJ: SHABA INVASION: DECLINING PROSPECTS FOR MOBUTU'S POLITICAL
SURVIVAL; RECOMMENDED US ACTION

SUMMARY: CURRENT INVASION OF SHABA HAS SERIOUSLY EXACERBATED POPULAR
DISSATISFACTION WITH MOBUTU REGIME. OUR CURRENT ASSESSMENT IS THAT
EVEN IF INVASION CAN BE CONTAINED QUICKLY, WHICH APPEARS DOUBTFUL,
MOBUTU'S POSITION WILL HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY WEAKENED. IN VIEW OF THIS
NEGATIVE TREND, I RECOMMEND WE TAKE DISCREET STEPS NOW TO PRESERVE
WIDESPREAD POSITIVE ATTITUDE IN ZAIRE TOWARD US BY STRESSING OUR
SUPPORT FOR ZAIRE'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AS OPPOSED TO SUPPORT FOR
MOBUTU REGIME PER SE. BELIEVE CAREFUL USE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY ALONG
LINES SUGGESTED IN THIS MESSAGE WOULD BE BEST WAY TO UNDERTAKE THIS
EFFORT. END SUMMARY.

1. ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING AND POTENTIALLY SERIOUS ASPECTS OF THE
CURRENT CRISIS IN ZAIRE IS THE DEGREE TO WHICH OPPOSITION SENTIMENT
TO MOBUTU HAS SURFACED ACROSS A BROAD SPECTRUM OF ZAIRIAN SOCIETY.
AS REFLECTED IN OUR REPORTING FOR A LONG TIME, UNHAPPINESS WITH
MOBUTU'S REGIME HAS GRADUALLY DEEPENDED AS A RESULT OF A VARIETY
OF GRIEVANCES: PROLONGED AND WORSENING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OCC-
ASSIONED IN PART BY DEPRESSED COPPER PRICES BUT ALSO IN LARGE MEASURE

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BY GROSS MISMANAGEMENT OF THE ECONOMY; WIDESPREAD AND OFTEN BLATANT
CORRUPTION, STARTING AT THE TOP OF THE REGIME AND SEEPING FAR DOWN;
CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION BY THE REGIME'S ELITE WHILE IT APPEALS FOR
NATIONAL AUSTERITY; MISPLACED PRIORITIES IN ALLOCATING DEVELOPMENTAL
RESOURCES, RESULTING IN MASSIVE DETERIORATION OF THE AGRICULTURAL
SECTOR; ILL-CONCEIVED POLICIES WITH RESPECT TO EDUCATION, THE CHURCH
AND OTHER NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS; PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL ISOLATION

OF THE LEADER FROM HIS FOLLOWERS.

2. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THE MOBUTU REGIME IS NOT WITHOUT VERY SIGNIFICANT PLUSES. NOT THE LEAST OF THESE IS IMPORTANT FACT OF LIFE THAT MOBUTU, IN CONTRAST TO ANY OTHER LEADER SINCE INDEPENDENCE, HAS ACHIEVED THE SEEMINLY IMPOSSIBLE BY CREATING POLITICAL STABILITY NATIONWIDE AND MAINTAINING IT FOR ALMOSE A DOZEN YEARS. A DEFT POLITICIAN, HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO BALANCE RIVAL FORCES, WEATHER POLITICAL STORMS, AND PROJECT THE MUCH-NEEDED IMAGE OF A SINGLE NATION UNDER A SINGLE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT AND LEADER.

3. BUT BEGINNING WITH THE ONSET OF ZAIRE'S ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS IN 1974, MOBUTU'S STAR HAS BEEN SLOWLY BUT PERSISTENTLY FALLING. WE HAVE WATCHED AND REPORTED THIS DECLINE, NOTING THAT WHILE POPULAR SUPPORT WAS WANING, MOBUTU'S CONTROL (NOTABLY OVER THE ARMY) NEVERTHELESS REMAINED INTACT. IT HAS BEEN AN INCREASINGLY VOLATILE SITUATION, BUT ONE WHICH COULD NEVERTHELESS PERSIST FOR A LONG TIME TO COME.

4. TODAY, THREE WEEKS INTO THE SHABA CRISIS, MY ASSESSMENT OF FACTORS AFFECTING MOBUTU'S POLITICAL VIABILITY IS DECIDEDLY MORE PESSIMISTIC. ALREADY THE INVASION HAS:

- SHOWN THE KEY BASE OF HIS POWER, THE ARMY, TO BE INEFFECTIVE;
- SHOWN THE WEAKNESS OF HIS POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WHICH IS INCAPABLE OF RALLYING THE POPULATION OR THE ELITE IN A MEANINGFUL SENSE;
- RALLIED A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF THE LUNDA POPULATION TO ITS CAUSE, THUS SETTING AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER DISAFFECTED PARTS OF THE COUNTRY AND SOCIETY;

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--DEMONSTRATED THAT FEW OF MOBUTU'S MUCH-VAUNTED WESTERN FRIENDS ARE ABLE OR WILLING TO HELP HIM;

--DEMONSTRATED THAT HE HAS POWERFUL ENEMIES, BOTH FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC, WHO SEEM PREPARED TO UNSEAT HIM AND INSTALL ANOTHER REGIME;

--CREATED PROSPECTS FOR EXACERBATION OF THE ECONOMIC/FINANCIAL SITUATION TO THE POINT WHERE, EVEN IF THE INVASION IS CONTAINED, IT IS HIGHLY QUESTIONABLE THAT INTERNATIONAL CREDITORS AND INVESTORS WILL CONTINUE WILLINGLY TO MAKE THE EFFORT REQUIRED TO GET THE ECONOMY GOING AGAIN.

I DO NOT EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE SITUATION COULD IMPROVE, NECESSITATING A REVISION OF OUR CURRENT NEGATIVE ASSESSMENT. BUT AS OF TODAY I MUST CONCLUDE THAT THE INVASION HAS SERIOUSLY UNDERMINED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE REGIME AS WE KNOW IT AND SIGNIFICANTLY ERODED THE ALREADY DWINDLING CREDIBILITY OF THE REGIME TO HANDLE THE NATION'S AFFAIRS.

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PAGE 01 KINSHA 02759 02 OF 02 281156Z
ACTION NODS-00

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /001 W
-----281157Z 007470 /12
O 261300Z MAR 77 CORRECTED COPY FOR MCN
FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2583

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5. I AM NOT PREDICTING MOBUTU'S IMMINENT DOWNFALL. IF THE FAZ CANNOT HOLD SHABA, OR CONTAIN THE INVASION -- OR COPE WITH PROLONGED IN-SURGENCY THER -- THEN MOBUTU'S EARULY POLITICAL DEMISE WOULD SEEM LIKELY. IF, ON THE OTHER HAND, THE SHABA PROBLEM CAN SOMEHOW BE RESOLVED QUICKLY AND SATISFACTORILY FROM THE STAND POINT OF ZAIRE'

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TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY, MOBUTU COULD RETAIN CONTROL FOR SOME TIME -- PERHAPS EVEN A LONG TIME -- TO COM. THERE IS NO WAY OF PREDICTING THIS, GIVEN ALL THE UNKNOWNNS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION. NOR CAN WE FORETELL EXACTLY HOW MOBUTU'S DEMISE MIGHT HAPPEN OR WHAT FORCES MIGHT RISE TO TAKE HIS PLACE. BUT WHAT IS APPARENT, NOW MORE THAN EVER BEFORE, IS THE RAPIDLY INCREASING DISSATISFACTION WITH HIS REGIME. AND IT IS THE BELIEF THAT THIS DISSATISFACTION AND UNPOPULARI

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REST ON BASIC FACTORS SUGGESTED IN PARA TWO ABOVE, RATHER THEN ON THE SHABA EVENTS THEMSELVES, THAT LEADS ME TO SERIOUSLY DOUBT MOBUTU'S ABILITY TO EFFECT A POLITICAL RECOVERY NO MATTER HOW WELL THE SHABA PROBLEM TURNS OUT.

6 THE PROBLEM WHICH MOBUTU'S GROWING UNPOPULARITY POSES FOR US DIPLOMACY AT A TIME WHEN THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF ZAIRE IS THRE-ATENED IS A DELICATE ONE. IN THE ABSENCE OF A CLEAR INDICATION THAT THE US DRAWS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN SUPPORT OF PRINCIPLES AND

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WELL, RISKS BEING ONE OF THE US GOVT PROPPING UP A REGIME UNWANTED AND UNSUPPORTED BY THE POPULACE. I BELIEVE IT IS IN OUR OWN SELF-INTEREST TO BEGIN TO DRAW THE DISTINCTION CLEARLY AND I BELIEVE THE PLACE TO START IS IN THE FIELD OF PUBBLIC DIPLOMACY.

7. I SPECIFICALLY RECOMMEND THAT THE NEXT TIME THE DEPT PRESS SPOKESMAN IS ASKED TO COMMENT ON OUR SUPPORT FOR MOBUTU, THE SPOKESMAN RESPOND THAT IN SUPPLYING THE MOBUTU GOVT WITH NON-LETHAL MILITARY ASSISTANCE THE US IS SUPPORTING THE PRINCIPLES OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND NON-INTERFERENCE, THAT THE US HAS HISTROICALLY SUPPORT THESE PRINCIPLES NOT ONLY IN AFRICA (EF NIGERIA) BUT IN OTHER AREAS OF THE WORLD (EGYUGOSLAVIA). THE SPOKESMAN SHOULD ALSO MAKE THE POINT THAT SUPPORT FOR THESE PRINCIPLES DOES NOT CONNOTE SUPPORT FOR A PARTICULAR LEADER BUT RATHER IMPLIES SUPPORT FOR THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE TO LIVE IN PEACE AND UNITY, FREE FROM OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE TO PURSUE THEIR VISION OF A JUST SOCIETY.

8. THE VOICE OF AMERICA COULD THEM PICK UP AND REPORT THE SPOKESMAN'S RESPONSE AND FOLLOW UP THE NEWS REPORT WITH AN ANALYSIS. I WOULD EXPECT THAT THE SPOKESMAN'S STATEMENT WOULD PRODUCE US PRESS SPECULATION TO THE EFFECT THAT THE US HAS CHANGED ITS POLICY AND IS PREPARED TO DUMP A CLIENT OF SOME 17 YEARS' STANDING. I RECOMMEND THAT WE LIMIT OUR RESPONSE TO REITERATING THAT THERE IS NO POLICY CHANGE BUT, RATHER, THAT THE US IS BEING FAITHFUL TO ITS HISTORIC TRADITIONS WITH RESPECT TO THE SUPPORT OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND NON-INTERFERENCE.

9. BY ESTABLISHING AND ENUNCIATING THESE PRINCIPLES WE WOULD BE PLACING A BIT OF DISTANCE BETWEEN US AND THE MAN MOBUTU -- ENOUGH SO THAT OUR POSITION WOULD BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD BY THE ZAIRIAN PEOPLE

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BUT NOT SO MUCH, I BELIEVE, THAT IT WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO MOBUTU'S DOWNFALL OR ELICIT FROM HIM A RASH REACTION AGAINST US. OBVIOUSLY
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THIS WOULD HAVE TO BE HANDLED WITH GREAT CARE AND IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE COULD SHIFT BACK OR FORTH DEPENDING ON DEVELOPMENTS. BUT IT WOULD BE A BEGINNING ON WHICH -- AGAIN DEPENDING ON DEVELOPMENTS -- WE MIGHT WISH TO FOLLOW UP WITH ADDITIIONAL STEPS DESIGNED TO UNDERSCORE OUR SUPPORT FOR A UNIFIED ZAIRE UNDER A CENTRAL AUTHORITY RATHER THAN FOR AN INDIVIDUAL LEADER. TO REPEAT, OUR PURPOSE IS IN NO WAY TO BRING DOWN OR EVEN WEAKEN MOBOTU. IT IS, RATHER, AN EFFORT TO COVER OUR BETS AND PRESERVE A BASICALLY FAVORABLE ATTITUDE TOWARD THE UNITED STATES WHICH PERSISTS ACROSS A BROAD SPECTURM OF ZAIRIAN SOCIETY. AN I BELIEVE THE TIME TO START THIS IS NOW, BEFORE MOBUTU DECIDES, AS HE MIGHT WELL DO, TO PUT FOREIGN MERCENARIES IN THE FIELD.

10. I HAVE DISCUSSED THE CONTENTS OF THIS MESSAGE WITH MY DCM AND

MY PAO BUT HAVE NOT SHARED IT WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COUNTRY TEAM.
HOWEVER, I HAVE NO REASON TO BELIEVE THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE FULL
AGREEMENT WITH THE COURSE OF ACTION I RECOMMEND.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL STABILITY, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, CORRUPTION, NATIONAL SECURITY, MILITARY ASSISTANCE, FOREIGN POLICY POSITION, INVASIONS, PUBLIC ATTITUDES, CAT-B
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Copy: SINGLE
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Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977KINSHA02759
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: P840083-0182, N770002-0196
Format: TEL
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Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: NODIS
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2987216
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SHABA INVASION: DECLINING PROSPECTS FOR MOBUTU'S POLITICAL SURVIVAL; RECOMMENDED US ACTION
TAGS: PFOR, MASS, MOPS, ECON, PINS, CG, US, (MUBUTO SESE SEKO)
To: STATE SS MULTIPLE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d2033ab1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009